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Portuguese coarsewares in early modern England: reflections on an exceptional pottery assemblage from Southampton

By ALEJANDRA GUTIÉRREZ

SUMMARY: The study of a large hoard of Merida-type ware from Portugal found during excavation in Southampton prompts an examination of Portuguese pottery in 16th- and 17th-century England, its trade, uses and context.

THE ASSEMBLAGE FROM SOUTHAMPTON

In 1973–74 large-scale excavations either side of the bailey wall of the castle in Upper Bugle Street in Southampton (Fig. 1) produced more than 400 different vessels of Merida-type ware (7,164 sherds, about 85kg), the largest assemblage ever found in northern Europe. Remarkably, most of these vessels came from a single context [B88] and, although occasional sherds (2.8%) were also found in surrounding layers, it is a single substantial deposit of contemporary material.¹

Merida-type ware is a misnomer for Portuguese coarsewares of characteristic brick-red fabric with quartz and mica inclusions, which were probably manufactured in the High Alentejo, an area extending inland from Lisbon and to the east.² Micaceous wares have traditionally been manufactured right across this part of the country, over the border into Spain (although fabrics and forms differ there) and as far as Merida in Badajoz (Fig. 2). The generic term Merida-type ware was adopted in the 1960s when it was assumed that the production of early post-medieval micaceous fabrics was centred on Merida, a well-known Roman pottery centre under active investigation at that time.³ The term ‘Merida-type ware’ has been retained by most scholars until further study is able to pinpoint and clarify the range of sources and workshops.

No medieval or post-medieval pottery kilns have yet been found in the Alentejo, except for one near Almada, south of Lisbon at the mouth of the River Tagus,⁴ though the area around Estremoz, Montemor-o-Novo and Crato is well known for its more recent pottery production. Clues to earlier manufacture come from Montemor, where 306 flawed vessels and wasters were found in the fills of vaults of the 16th-century Dominican priory of São Domingos. These pieces are unlikely to have been transported far and provide evidence for the local production of vessels in ‘red clay’,⁵ among the pieces collected being a two-handled costrel very similar to those found in England (see below). Nearby Crato (Fig. 2) is also known to have been an important pottery centre since at least the 14th century and manufacture was later stimulated here in the 17th century by King Alfonso VI’s grants of privileges for the free extraction of potting clay.⁶ Production continued well into the 19th century, when most of the inhabitants were potters. Pottery recovered from excavations confirms the presence of local pots in several fabrics, one of them being characteristically red, but all containing abundant quartz and mica. These differences in fabrics can at least partly be explained by potters using local clays of differing colour and quality.⁷ The region was well linked strategically to Lisbon, from where pots could be exported by sea.

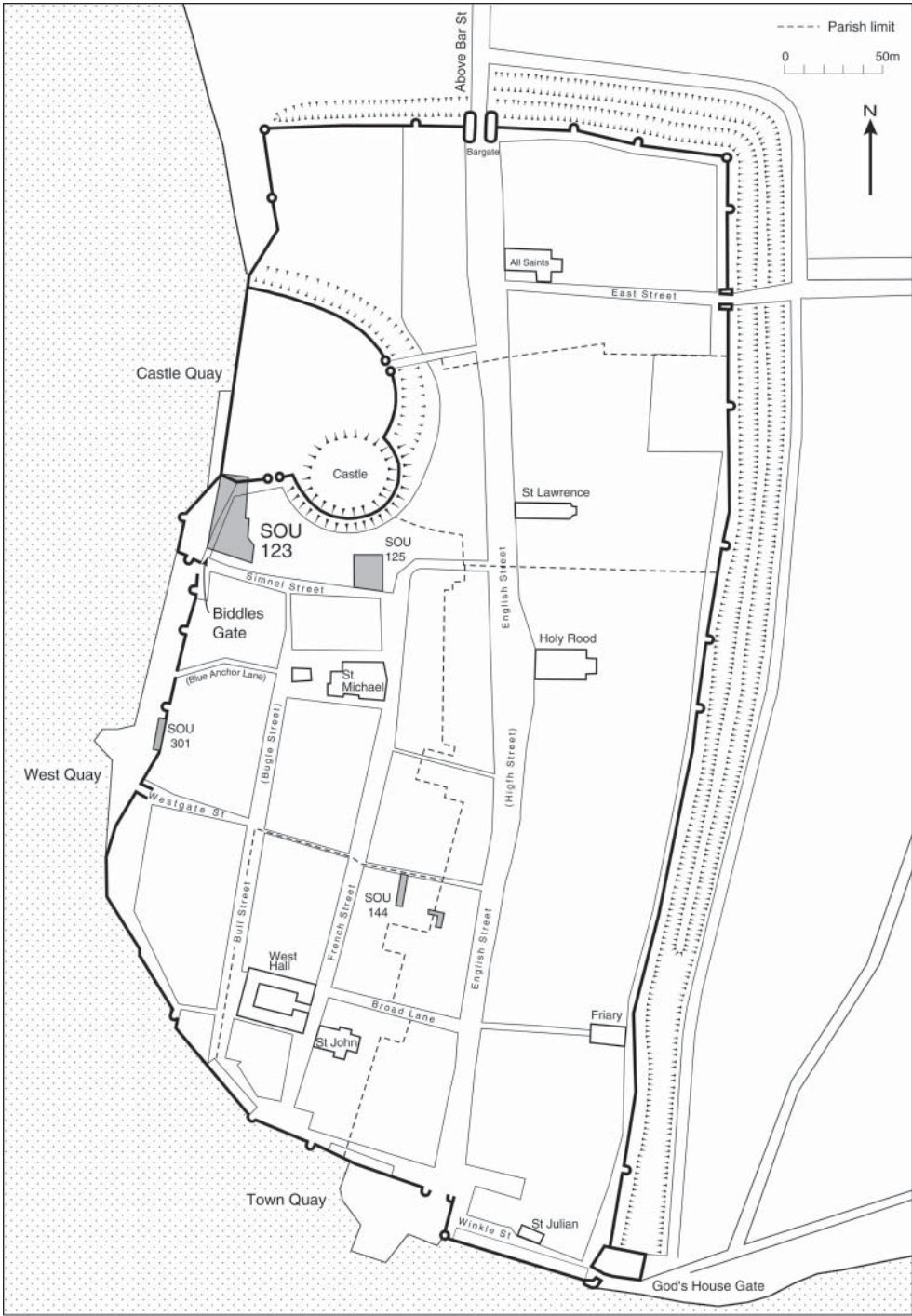


FIG. 1

The sites mentioned in the text located on a reconstructed early 17th-century Southampton, based on Speed's map of 1611 and the 1454 terrier (Burgess 1976). SOU 123 Upper Bugle Street; SOU 125 near Upper Bugle Street; SOU 144 St John's Lane; SOU 301 Arcades.

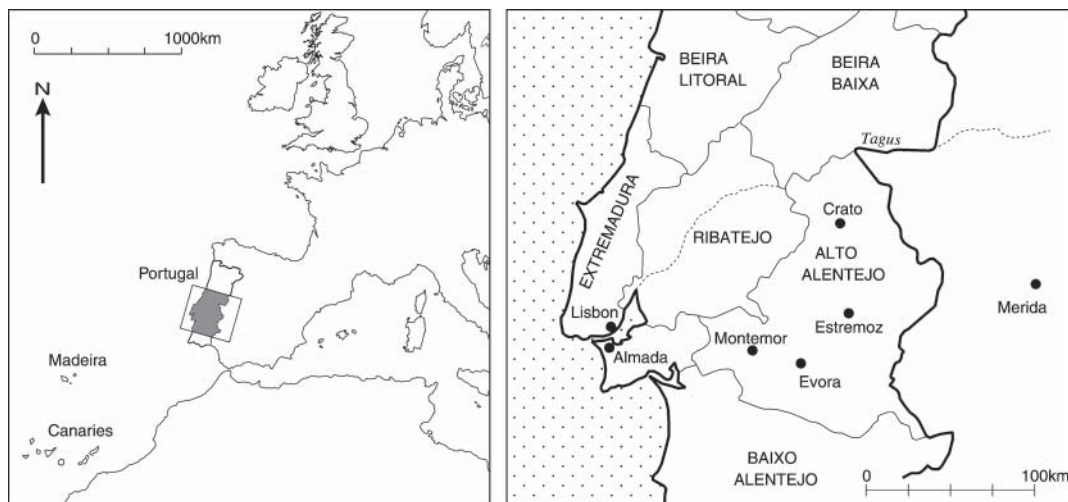


FIG. 2

The Alentejo area of Portugal and other places mentioned in the text.

FABRICS

All the vessels from context [B88] have a very similar red fabric with slightly darker, more intensely coloured surfaces; only one vessel has a darker grey interior due to the reducing conditions during its firing. The fabric is very fine and hard, the only visible inclusions ($\times 20$ magnification) being sparse transparent rounded quartz, poorly sorted, 0.2–1mm in size, rare white quartz up to 2mm and rare clay relicts up to 0.5mm. The main characteristic of the fabric, however, is the abundant quantity of poorly sorted mica flakes up to 3mm across which glint visibly on the surface of the pots with a yellow or red sheen.

Most of the bases are heavily covered in pure mica plates, suggesting that the vessels would have stood on mica powder or at least a highly micaceous clay dust while they were being decorated and the handles added, presumably to avoid the vessel sticking to the working surface or table.

All the vessels are unglazed, but the visible surface (exterior of closed forms; interior of open forms) has been smoothed over with a narrow tool. Sometimes this amounts to real burnishing, with shiny lines being drawn on the red surfaces.

FORMS

Although no complete vessels were recovered from the excavations at Upper Bugle Street, several types were clearly present, including both open and closed forms (Figs 3–7). Their distribution across excavated contexts is indicated in Tables 1 and 2.

There are a minimum of 36 *lebrillos* or flared bowls in several different sizes. The larger ones range between 400 and 600mm in diameter, although the smaller ones, sometimes called dishes, are half that size, between 200 and 250mm in diameter. All have plain bases, but their rim profiles vary from plain or everted to square. The interiors of the smaller forms are sometimes burnished with concentric lines.

The most common type of vessel present in the Southampton assemblage is a bowl with convex sides somewhat smaller than *lebrillos*; 1,237 rims of this form alone were recovered (13.1kg). Although a handful of examples have a carinated profile (Fig. 4:15–17) and a couple of examples have a footring, they are the exceptions; most of the bases are slightly concave or even recessed (Fig. 4:18) and between 50 and 80mm in diameter. Two main types of rim can be identified, although there were many slight differences and identical forms were infrequent. The most abundant is plain and everted, usually with an incised line on the exterior wall, just below the rim (for example, Fig. 4:3–5). The second most common type of rim is clubbed, being square and projecting (for example, Fig. 4:8–9). Like the *lebrillos*, the walls of these bowls are sometimes burnished with concentric lines on their interiors.

The jars are all very fragmented, although a variety of rim profiles, straight necks and narrow bases can still be picked out (Fig. 5). Invariably they have a burnished exterior wall with vertical lines, and one has concentric burnished bands

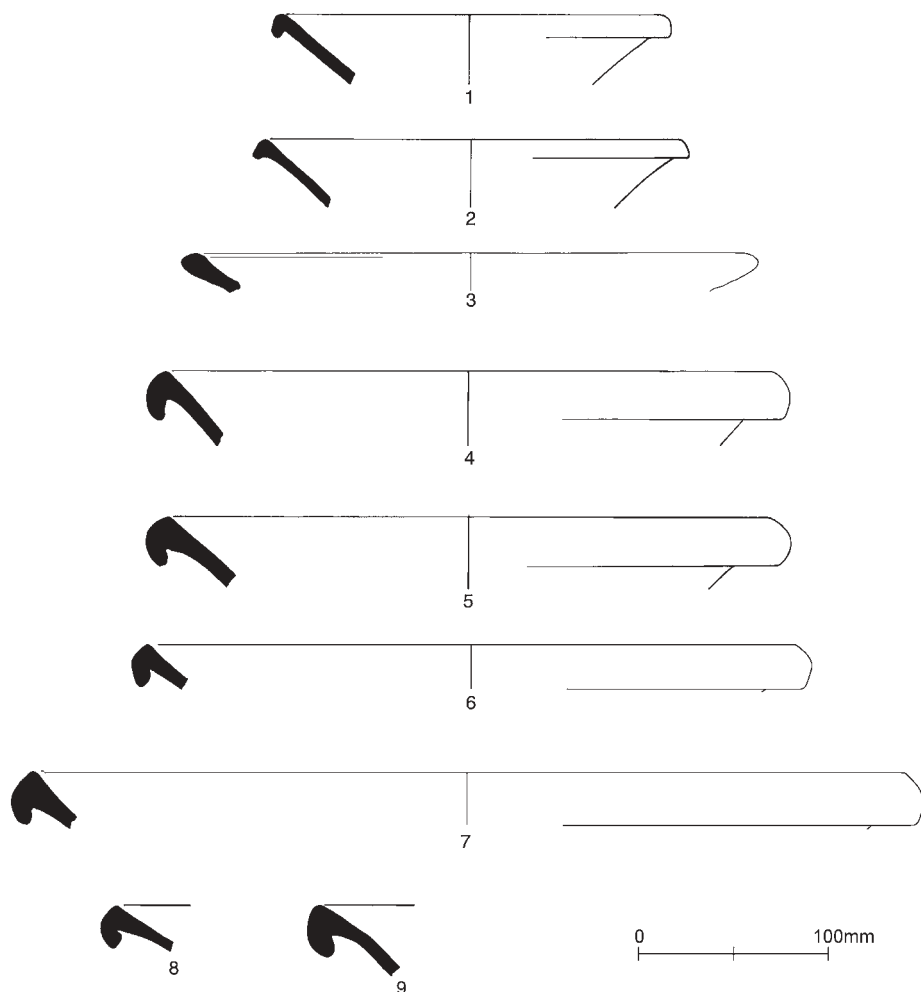


FIG. 3

Southampton, Upper Bugle Street: Merida-type *lebrillos*.

around the body. On the basis of the rims recovered, at least 46 jars are present. It is possible that a few decorated small body sherds might belong also to jars. These have incised and burnished decoration (Fig. 5:26–30).

The main difference between Merida-type costrels and bottles is the presence of two handles on the former. Both types are effectively jars with narrow mouths and necks standing about 200–250mm tall. Given their similarity in shape, it is not always easy to differentiate between them, although bottles are rarely found in Britain at this date. A further type of costrel in the shape of a barrel can be also be identified by the rilled,

tall necks (Fig. 6:1–2; the shape here has been reconstructed from a complete vessel found in Plymouth⁸). Judging by the number of bases in the assemblage, there are a minimum of 44 costrels/bottles.

Small jugs have plain rims, globular bodies, plain splayed bases and a single handle (Fig. 7:1–11). No spouts were identified among a minimum number of 70 examples in the assemblage, and from parallels elsewhere it seems they may not have had them. They stand about 120mm tall (that illustrated in Fig. 7:10 is reconstructed from several sherds from different vessels). They are always burnished on the exterior wall, usually with

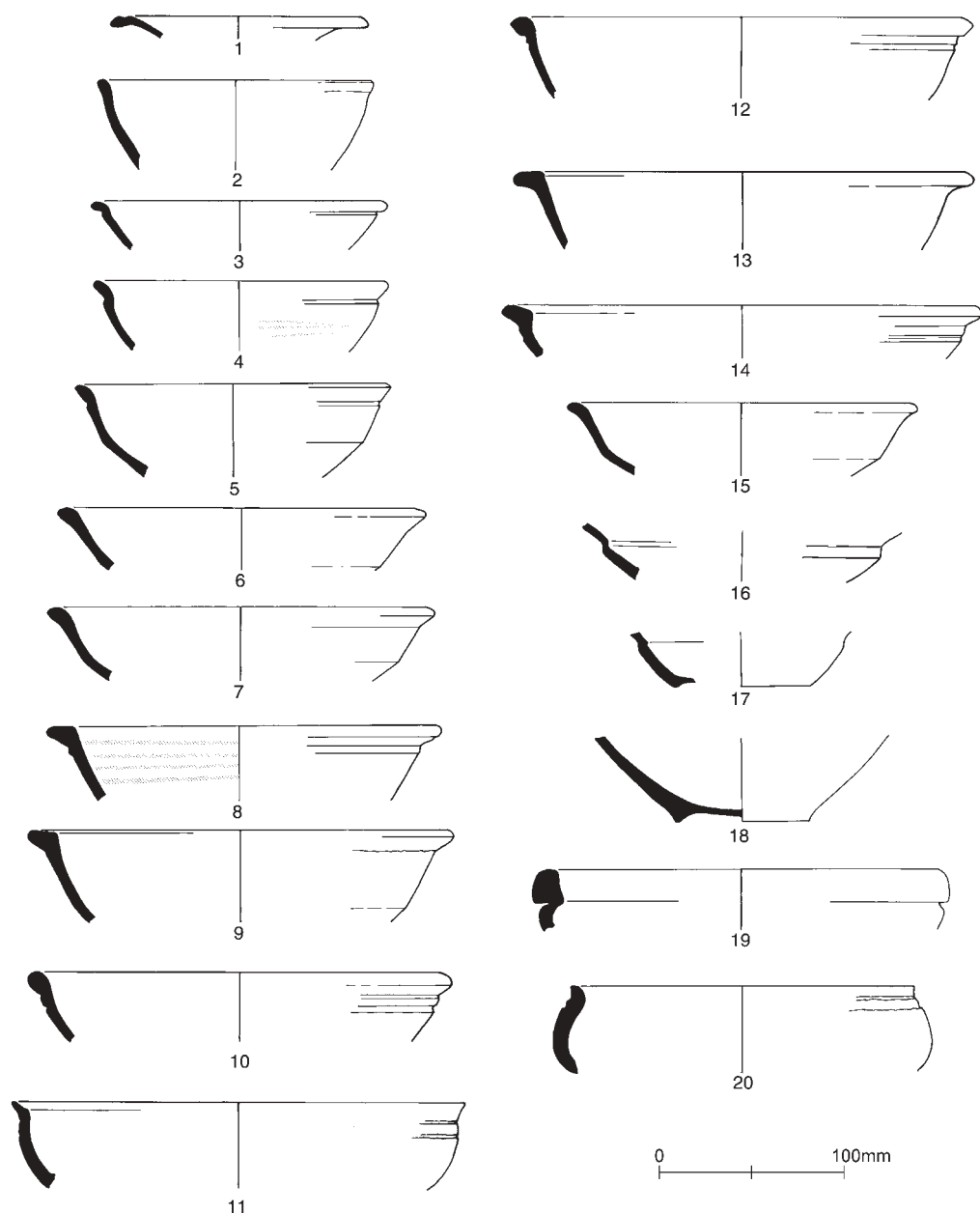


FIG. 4
Southampton, Upper Bugle Street: Merida-type bowls.

a lattice pattern, and are notably delicate and thin-walled.

Finally, the sugar moulds are cone-shaped with a hole in the base (Fig. 7:12–17). Two different types of rims are present: collared

and plain, sometimes with one or two incised exterior lines around the rim (Fig. 7:12–15). The diameter of the rim varies between 200 and 340mm. A maximum number of 73 moulds was found.

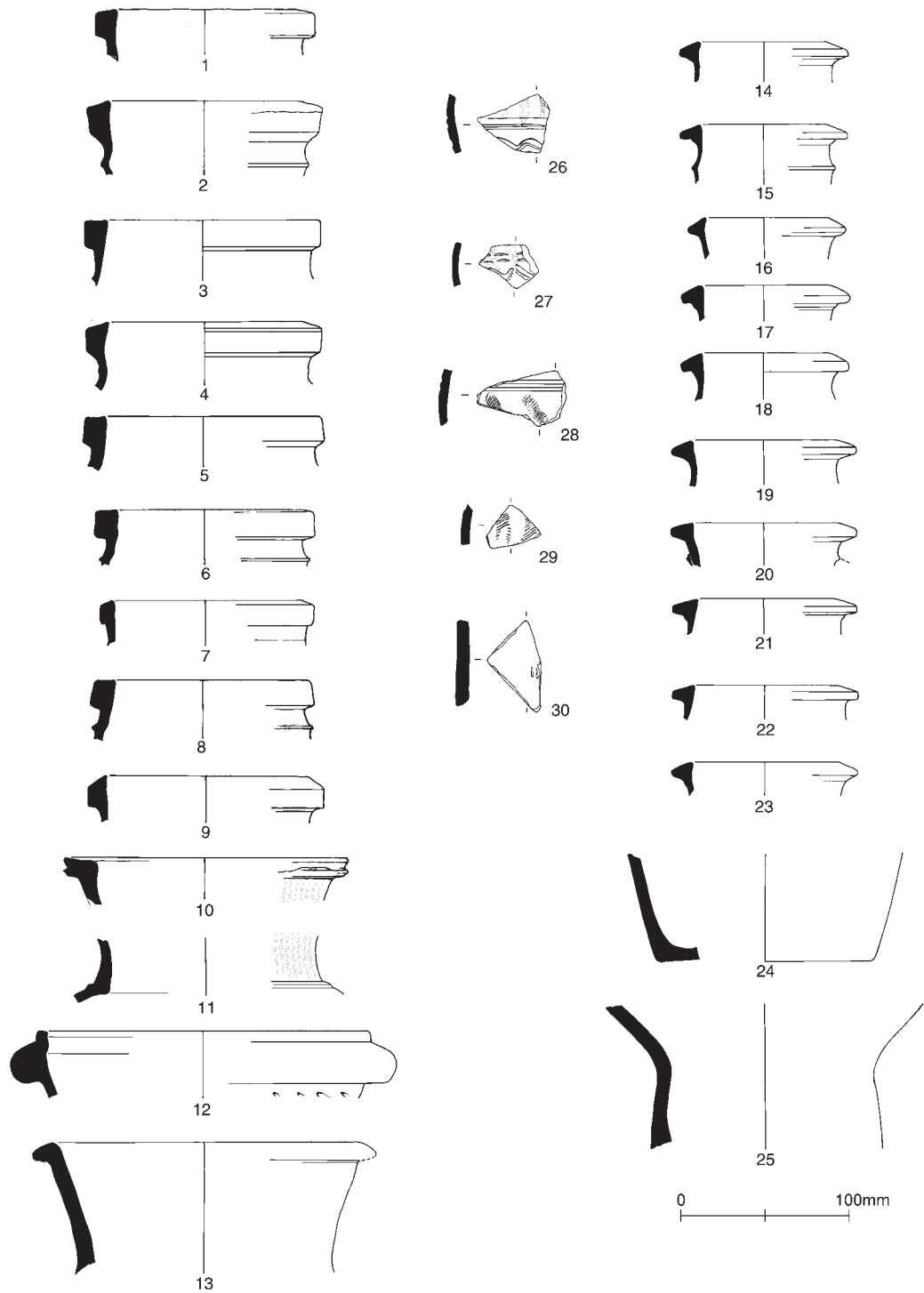


FIG. 5

Southampton, Upper Bugle Street: Merida-type jars. 26–30. Incised and burnish-decorated sherds.

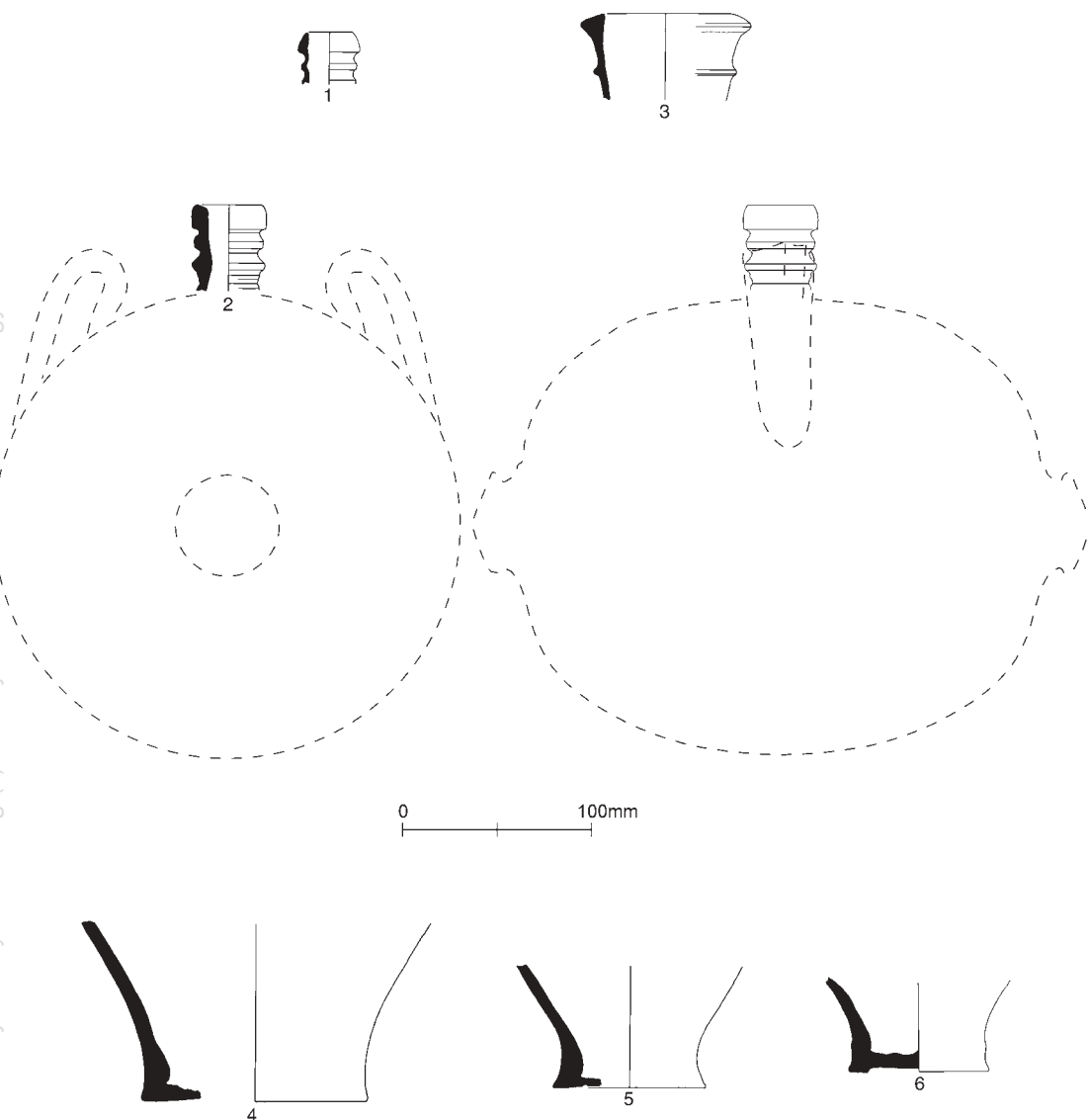


FIG. 6

Southampton, Upper Bugle Street: Merida-type costrels.

DATING

Sadly there is no means of independently dating this assemblage and we have to rely to some extent on the chronological evidence provided by the pottery in its own right. Costrels of Merida-type were first imported into England at the end of the 13th century and continued to arrive throughout the medieval and post-medieval period with no variation in their shape.⁹ The other forms

illustrated here are less ubiquitous and so far they have only been found in significant numbers from Exeter and Plymouth.¹⁰ Small jugs and *lebrillos* have been recovered from 16th-century contexts in Exeter,¹¹ and from 17th-century Plymouth.¹² Jars, *lebrillos* and bowls also appear associated with the Armada wrecks of 1588 which provisioned its pottery at both Seville and Lisbon.¹³

Other pottery recovered from the excavations at Bugle Street and from the same context as the

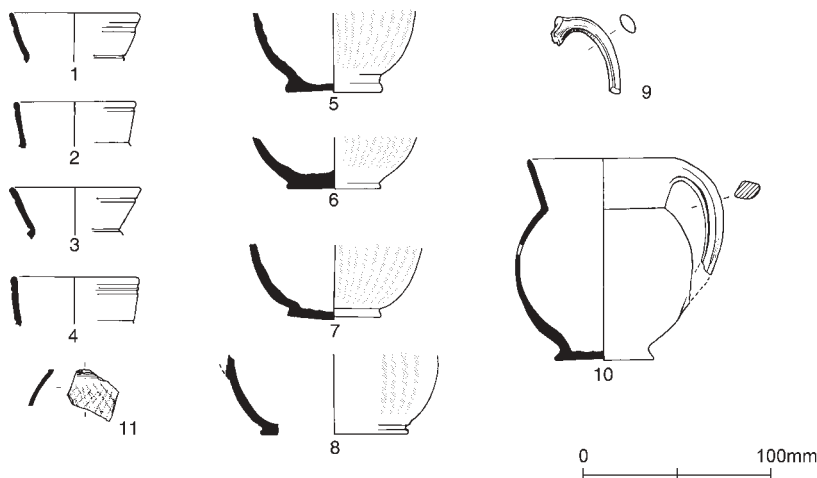


FIG. 7

Southampton, Upper Bugle Street: Merida-type, 1–11. little jugs; 12–17. sugar cones.

bulk of the Merida-ware includes several other imports, among them fragments of eight Seville-type olive jars of a type dated to the 16th–18th centuries¹⁴ and two small bowls and one plate of Plain White ware, also from Seville and dating to the end of the 15th–mid-17th centuries.¹⁵ Among

the Italian pots are a white-slipped lead-glazed albarello and a bowl and lid of north Italian marbled ware. The presence of these marbled wares, traditionally dated to the end of the 16th–mid-17th centuries, brings greater precision to the dating of the assemblage as a whole.¹⁶

TABLE 1

Southampton, Upper Bugle Street: distribution of Merida-type wares in context [B88] (weight and number of fragments)

Form	Sherd type	g	No.
<i>Lebrillo</i>	rim	1,571	33
	base	1,764	40
Bowl	rim	13,193	1,237
	base	5,452	354
	wall	78	6
Bowl/ <i>lebrillo</i>	wall	7,487	972
Jars	neck	1,085	58
	wall (burnished)	4,981	722
Costrels/bottles	rim	273	32
	neck	85	27
Costrel?	rim	28	2
Jars/costrels	handle	2,004	78
Jars/costrels	base	1,784	66
Small jugs	rim	159	72
	base	897	80
	wall	1,917	698
	handle	366	72
Sugar moulds	rim	8,340	76
	base	1,423	44
Sugar moulds, jars, costrels	wall	27,048	2,272
Misc.	rim	706	20
Total		80,641	6,961

PORTUGUESE POTTERY IN BRITAIN

Portuguese coarsewares are not unknown in Southampton. Finds have been retrieved from excavated contexts in the town from as early as the beginning of the 14th century. Three different costrels were found in 1300–50 contexts in the High Street; and a further example of mid-14th-century date comes from Cuckoo Lane.¹⁷ Vessels of this type continued to be used in the town during the medieval period and until the middle of the 17th century. Costrels were the most common form during the 14th–16th centuries and, all told, at least 44 of them have been found across the town. Among the other forms identified there are eight bowls and two *lebrillos* (mainly in 16th-century contexts), 21 jars and jugs, six olive jars, two lids, and seventeen sugar moulds. In this latter group, single moulds were found on excavations near Upper Bugle Street and St John's Lane, and a much larger group of fifteen vessels (36 sherds) were excavated from the Arcades site by the quay (Fig. 1). Overall, Portuguese coarsewares have been recovered from 28 different excavations across Southampton¹⁸ and, although the numbers might not look spectacular in comparison with the quantity of local pottery, they help to put finds from elsewhere in England into context.

Across Britain and Ireland Merida-type ware has been found on about 100 sites,¹⁹ although it only seems to appear in large quantities in London and the southern ports, the main points of entry for

TABLE 2

Southampton, Upper Bugle Street: distribution of Merida-type wares in other contexts (weight and number of fragments)

Form	Sherd	[B106]		[B109]		[B132]		[B143]		[B168]		[B198]		[B226]	
		g	No.	g	No.	g	No.	g	No.	g	No.	g	No.	g	No.
<i>Lebrillo</i>	rim	285	4	–	–	83	2	–	–	–	–	43	2	19	1
Bowl	rim	72	6	–	–	111	11	7	1	39	2	29	4	95	6
	base	92	6	–	–	53	5	100	4	–	–	8	2	29	2
Bowl/ <i>lebrillo</i>	wall	221	11	–	–	77	9	10	3	21	2	1	1	195	6
	base	236	6	–	–	–	–	43	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
Small jug	wall	–	–	–	–	–	–	4	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
	base	18	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	handle	6	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Jars	rim	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	26	1
	wall	36	7	–	–	100	12	114	8	4	1	88	7	87	8
	base	83	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sugar cone	rim	624	7	–	–	63	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	wall	–	–	–	–	108	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	base	–	–	–	–	–	–	69	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
Misc.	wall	981	34	22	2	–	–	–	–	89	4	–	–	–	–
	handle	101	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total		2,755	89	22	2	595	44	347	19	53	9	169	16	451	24

Portuguese goods. Finds from London amount to about 300 sherds and derive from contexts dated between the middle of the 15th and mid-19th centuries; quantities are spread across the capital and the largest assemblage so far recorded amounts to about 110 sherds of 18th-century vessels from excavations along the waterfront.²⁰

Among the southern ports, the main concentrations are at Poole, Portsmouth and especially Plymouth. The role of Bristol remains unknown since finds there are as yet unquantified.²¹ The material from Poole amounts to 204 sherds; the earliest (11%) dates to the 14th–15th centuries from beach sand pre-reclamation and consists only of costrels. A range of other forms including olive jars, bowls, *lebrillos*, dishes and small jugs was also found in 16th- and 17th-century town houses and tenements there.²² The quantities from Plymouth are even greater, with 1,600 sherds recovered from a single excavation in St Andrews Street.²³

This coastal urban presence is undoubtedly the most striking feature of the distribution of Merida-type pottery in England, but it does not by any means account for all known finds. Costrels, jars and bowls have also been collected at magnate residences and religious sites, usually one or two vessels at each place only, among them Bishop's Waltham palace, Romsey Abbey and Wickham Glebe moated site (Hants), Shapwick moated site, Woodspring Priory and Cleve Abbey (Somerset) and Polsloe Priory (Devon).²⁴ Most of these vessels found are containers of some kind, such as the olive jar from Romsey Abbey (16th–17th centuries) or the costrel from Cleve Abbey (mid-16th century); a possible globular jug was also found at the former and a bowl and lid from Polsloe Priory, here dated by the accompanying wares to the Dissolution deposits of around 1536.

One exception is the much larger group from the moated site at Acton Court, in south Gloucestershire, which is dated to the 16th century and totals 92 sherds. Half of these were found in the pre-1540s fill of the moat where they appear together with other uncommon imports, such as Plain Blue albarelli from Seville,²⁵ Seville white-ware, Martincamp flasks, Beauvais wares and Italian maiolicas.²⁶ The quantity and range of imports present here is unusual; it is most likely that at least some of the vessels were acquired directly by Sir Robert Poyntz (1467–1520). Although a member of the gentry, Sir Robert had commercial interests in Bristol, acting as the king's agent there, and he later became chancellor to Queen Catherine of Aragon (d. 1536).²⁷ His trading contacts might help explain why he had access to less common types of pottery. The chapel where he was to be buried, the Lord Mayor's Chapel in Bristol, was floored with

a unique group of almost 800 brightly decorated tiles from Seville, although it is not known if he or his son Sir Frances, who was in charge of finishing the chapel after his father's death, actually bought the tiles. Sir Frances was also an agent in Spain and may have brought the tiles back with him.²⁸ Direct purchase at source is at least one way of explaining the presence of highly unusual pots and/or extremely high quantities of imports at inland sites.²⁹ Whether the acquisition and display of such exotics was seen as an opportunity to display cultural affinities with the Spanish court in England (in a time of peace) is more difficult to prove archaeologically, although there is no doubt that 'fashions' in interior decoration as much as in other aspects of life could be influenced by royal patronage.³⁰ The use of Spanish lustrewares from Malaga in English households may have been introduced to England with Queen Eleanor of Castile at the end of the 13th century, for example, and that of inlaid floor tiles with Eleanor of Provence in the middle of the same century.³¹

On the other hand, one may well wonder what aesthetic attraction could possibly have been exerted by Portuguese coarsewares such as those at Upper Bugle Street with their red fabrics and undecorated surfaces, which were, after all, not unlike some of the plainer local pots. Could the shapes have added novelty to gentry tables? Or could the shiny flakes of mica really have been enough to attract purchasers and distinguish them visually as being of a more exotic origin? It is certainly true that, in spite of their plain appearance, pots like these were much sought after by European courts in the 16th century, becoming popular with the gentry class. Individual pieces were collected and specially ordered by queens and kings from Portugal to Italy and Flanders, the main attraction being not the colour but the 'excellent smell and taste' of the clay.³² The smaller vessels were used to serve water and kept it cool, a quality which was especially sought after in warmer Mediterranean climes, though whether this was much appreciated in Britain is harder to say. After drinking the water, ladies were given to biting the clay container, a custom common to both Spain and Portugal. The eating of the tiny container, such as that represented by Velázquez in *Las Meninas*, was widespread and even abused in some quarters, so much as that this 'vice' was left to priests to moderate in the confessional by imposing days of abstinence.³³ Surprised witnesses to this custom included French and Italian commentators who wrote home excusing these indulgences as being due to the many properties of this particular clay which could even cure illnesses.³⁴

TRADE

Although of lesser economic importance than that with France and Spain, English trade with Portugal was well established during the Middle Ages and early modern period, cemented by good political relations throughout. Historical records show that the Portuguese visited mainly Southampton, London and Bristol, and occasionally Exeter too, bringing wine, dried fruit, olive oil, oranges, dyes, cork, salt and sugar and returning mainly with cloth, together with tin and lead.³⁵ English merchants themselves also began to visit Portugal directly at the beginning of the 14th century, especially Lisbon and Porto. Importantly, exchange was not necessarily direct and it was this which secured the arrival of goods even at times of war or conflict. Portuguese ships favoured Flanders, as well as other stop-over ports along the coast of France, from where goods could have been re-exported to England, while Italians established in Portugal could also dispatch local goods aboard Italian vessels.³⁶ These patterns of trade are further complicated once it is realized that Portuguese products which reached the north of England were routinely re-distributed via France and the Low Countries,³⁷ just as foreign goods could be freighted out from main ports, such as Southampton and London, and then along the south coast to Exeter and other English ports.³⁸ Some of the provincial ports, such as Plymouth, also re-directed goods to London along the coast.³⁹

TRADE IN POTTERY

The assemblage from Upper Bugle Street therefore presents several difficulties in its interpretation. Given that it is unique both in the quantity and type of forms found, the suspicion must be that it represents a cargo load of Portuguese pots, rather than deriving from household occupation. This suggestion is supported by unpublished data from the city archives which refers to this tenement in 1603 as 'the storehouse at the Biddles gate', comprising 'loft, cellar and solar' and apparently rented out to merchants from that date onwards.⁴⁰ The tenement was conveniently placed near the quay, in one of the main thoroughfares, and is already recorded in the 15th century as a cellar.⁴¹ As well, the recent discovery of a wreck off the Portuguese coast near Aveiro (55km south of Oporto) shows that Portuguese pottery was indeed transported by sea in unusual combinations.⁴² The cargo of this small boat contained around 200 pottery vessels, some smaller forms found *in situ* still packed inside the larger ones, and was dated by dendrochronology to the middle of the 15th century. Included in the shipment were some familiar pottery types

including sugar cones, costrels, small burnished jugs, bowls, *lebrillos* and jars which seem to have changed little in profile until the 17th century.

There is thus good reason to suppose that the Upper Bugle Street assemblage represents a cargo which included not only containers like costrels but also smaller forms such as bowls and small jugs. The implication is that some coarseware pottery from Portugal was being traded to England in its own right,⁴³ although admittedly the quantities do seem to have been small and their distribution limited. This would explain why finds across Britain are clearly linked to those southern ports which maintained trade with Portugal and why finds of Portuguese coarsewares other than costrels are rare inland.

But, if Portuguese pottery was being imported, why was it not recorded? The most striking pottery of the medieval period imported into England, mainly from Spain but also from Italy, certainly did attract the curiosity of customs officers on arrival and, as a result, quantities arriving at the port were sometimes recorded. Problems in interpreting these entries, prices and quantities have been the subject of a detailed study elsewhere.⁴⁴ Overall, trade in Mediterranean pottery seems to have been limited in Britain, especially in comparison with later stonewares from northern Europe, which were mass produced and imported by the million. This was trade of a quite different character: steady, voluminous, and widely distributed across the country, saturating all levels of society from the middle of the 15th century onwards.⁴⁵

By contrast, Portuguese pottery like the Merida-type wares from Upper Bugle Street, was never recorded in the port books, or at least in a form that can now be readily identified. Some awareness of where the pottery was made is recognized, however, in the entry for the 'green pancheon made in Portugal' that John Norton named in his 1568 will,⁴⁶ but so far this is a unique reference in Southampton. It is quite possible that some of the entries of pots registered for Portuguese boats might refer to Portuguese pots, but their origin is not established in the documents. In 1584, for example, three dozen 'earthen dishes' arrived at Milford in south Wales from Aveiro in Portugal,⁴⁷ but the production centre for the pottery was not known or at least written down.

TRADE IN SUGAR

Another intriguing aspect of the Southampton assemblage is the presence of sugar moulds. Sugar arrived in England throughout the Middle Ages, and was first imported from the Mediterranean and northern Africa (Barbary), and later from the

West Indies in the 17th and 18th centuries. Production is attested in Spain before the 13th century, but could only be exported northwards once Muslim power contracted in the Mediterranean and trade channels opened through the straits of Gibraltar. Local production in Spain and Portugal soon gave way to that in the Canary Islands and Madeira, especially the latter, and it was through exports from Madeira that Portuguese sugar came to dominate northern European ports.⁴⁸ After a few attempts in the 16th century, sugar refining only took off in Britain in the middle of the 17th century.⁴⁹

The process of making sugar consisted of crushing the canes between mill stones, then boiling it in water, from which a sweet brown syrup was obtained, the scum and dirt being extracted at intervals.⁵⁰ The syrup was then poured into the cone-shaped pots, so shaped as to ease the collection of the heavier molasses at the base of the pot. The hole at the bottom of the mould was closed with flax or some similar blocking and then opened 'after a week' when the sugar had crystallized and could be separated from the molasses, which by now had collected at the bottom of the mould. The mould was then placed in a small clay jar where the hole could be opened and the molasses drained out below, leaving a solid sugar 'loaf' above.⁵¹

Sugar could be boiled up to three times to improve refinement, the price varying accordingly.⁵² Merchandise books lists up to ten different types, including white, muscovado, mellis, refined and molasses, candy sugar being the most expensive.⁵³ At least some of the sugar, including that coming from Barbary and Brazil, was refined in England.⁵⁴

Sugar is recorded in the port books as arriving in a variety of containers. Most references are to 'boxes' or 'cases' and 'barrels',⁵⁵ but mention is also made of sugar in *pottes* and *in ollis*, plainly some kind of pottery container. It is clear from later references that earthen 'sugar moulds' were regularly traded, a cargo of 1,060 of them arrived in Plymouth in 1594, for example,⁵⁶ although it is not clear whether they were travelling full or empty, for use in the refining process in England.

TRADED PRODUCTS IN CONTAINERS

It is assumed that the costrels reached England as containers for Mediterranean products, and therefore that they were acquired not for their own value as ceramics but for their content. Among the goods documented as being exported from Portugal some could have travelled in pottery containers, especially oil, salt and wine. Salt was imported to England, mainly from France, but

also from Spain and Portugal. The request of a Portuguese factor residing in Venice for 500 *cantaros* or jars of salt⁵⁷ would suggest that at least some salt could travel in pottery containers.

Unfortunately, port books simply note quantities arriving and avoid any description of how goods travelled or how they were packaged, but a couple of exceptional archaeological finds can help make up for this lack in the written records. One of them is a Merida-type costrel from Carmarthen Greyfriars which was found to contain cinnabar, a mercuric sulphide which produces a vermilion pigment used in inks and paints.⁵⁸ Dyes were fundamental for the local cloth industry and a wide selection were imported throughout the medieval period from the Mediterranean, including vegetal dyes, such as brazilwood, safflower, saffron, turmeric and woad, prestigious animal dyes like kermes, as well as mineral dyes such as indigo and cinnabar.⁵⁹

Another revealing find is the Merida-type costrel found in the cabin of the 'barber surgeon' aboard the *Mary Rose* when the ship sunk in 1545. This costrel was discovered inside a wooden chest together with surgical tools, syringes, wooden canisters and German stoneware jugs full of ointments and herbal remedies, such as peppercorns.⁶⁰ Given its findspot, it seems probable that the costrel would have contained some sort of vegetal or mineral product used by the apothecary. Those imported from the Mediterranean included mercury and treacle, both with medicinal applications such as the treatment of skin diseases, including the great pox, syphilis and colds.⁶¹ For lesser ailments, such as sea-sickness, citrus fruits and pomegranates, also from the Mediterranean, were recommended, while wine could be used to wash and disinfect wounds.⁶² It is somewhat surprising therefore that the costrel was found to contain *Polypodium vulgare* or polypody root extract mixed with (possibly) milk; this fern extract would have been used in the treatment of 'melancholy', drawing out 'fleame and cholor'.⁶³ Unfortunately, as the plant is found widely across Europe, including both Britain and Portugal, we cannot be sure if the costrel had been reused by the surgeon to contain one of his own remedies, in the same way as the German stoneware jugs also found in the chest, or if the mixture was made up in Portugal for export. There is, however, little doubt that the costrel arrived full when it reached England as, whatever the contents, its still surviving stopper was made of cork oak from the Iberian Peninsula.⁶⁴

Whereas vermilion is recorded as arriving in England aboard Mediterranean boats, the fact that the costrel aboard the *Mary Rose* had a possible secondary use should remind us of the practical

function of imported containers, and that — at least in some cases — rather than indicating a link with some exotic southern product and a world of luxury, they were merely recycled everyday wares, good only so long as they lasted. It seems likely that all these imported pots were selected specifically by the ‘barber surgeon’. Probably the stonewares offered a resistant, durable and hard container when compared against local earthenware jugs, and their narrow necks allowed the contents to be sealed easily,⁶⁵ whereas the shape of the Merida-type costrel, easily closed with a cork, would have been ideal for storing a liquid remedy.

CONCLUSION

Finds of Merida-type coarsewares are few and far across the country. Among this type of Portuguese pottery, the two-handled container or costrel is the more commonly found, but they may have been acquired for what they contained rather than for the value of the pot itself. As the *Mary Rose* find indicates, once their original contents were exhausted, containers could then be reused; so their presence on a site does not necessarily imply imported Portuguese products.

In the search for explanations for particular findspots, the national distribution of Merida-type coarsewares also highlights the impact of personal contacts on the material culture of any one site, particularly in the case of Acton Court, and stresses the value of historical research in the fleshing out of details of ownership and occupancy. The main conclusion to be drawn from this research, however, is that some trade in Portuguese coarsewares certainly occurred with England. Although the arrival of Portuguese pottery has gone largely unrecorded in documents, in contrast to other Mediterranean pottery which was regularly traded, large groups of pottery imported from a single source, such as that excavated at Upper Bugle Street, may only be explained by these exceptional circumstances and is best interpreted as a Portuguese cargo. Whether this pottery entered Southampton directly or via Flanders and other ports cannot now be known, nor do we understand fully what motivated the purchase. Perhaps financial risk was to be spread widely by serving several intended markets, one for sugar moulds, another for bowls and jars reflecting European fashions. Whatever the case, when compared with the movement of other Portuguese goods such as food-stuffs and manufactured goods (such as sugar, oil, spices and dyes), the contribution of pottery was seemingly marginal in economic terms.

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NOTES

¹ Finds from medieval contexts have been published in Brown 2002 and will not be considered here.

² Gutiérrez 2000, 74–9.

³ Hurst *et al.* 1986, 69.

⁴ Torres 1990.

⁵ Ribeiro 1984.

⁶ Sousa 1930, 62–3.

⁷ Catarino 1995, 132.

⁸ Clark 1979, fig. 34:270.

⁹ Hurst *et al.* 1986, 69.

¹⁰ Clark 1979, 47–9; Allan 1995, 303.

¹¹ Allan 1984, nos 2746, 2751.

¹² Allan & Barber 1992, nos 8–11.

¹³ Martin 1979, 299; 1995.

¹⁴ Gutiérrez 2000, fig. 2.37.

¹⁵ Gutiérrez 2000, fig. 2.37.

¹⁶ Hurst *et al.* 1986, 33–7.

¹⁷ Platt & Coleman Smith 1975, fig. 204:1279, 1280, 1283, 1293; Hurst 1977, 32:42, 44, 47.

¹⁸ Gutiérrez 2000, appendix 2.

¹⁹ Gerrard *et al.* 1995a.

²⁰ The Pier Head, South West India Dock Entrance, E14 (site SW197), Lyn Blackmore and Chris Jarrett, pers. comm.

²¹ Ponsford & Burchill 1995.

²² Horsey 1992; Watkins 1994.

²³ Broady 1986.

²⁴ Lewis 1985, 115; Gutiérrez 2000, appendix 2; 2007; Coleman-Smith 1996; Allan 1999; 1995, 311.

²⁵ For terminology, see Gutiérrez 2000, fig. 2.27.

²⁶ Vince & England 2004.

²⁷ Manco 2004, 22.

²⁸ Williams 1995.

²⁹ Gutiérrez 2000, 179, 183.

³⁰ Tolley 1995.

³¹ Gutiérrez 2000, 178; Eames 1992.

³² Vasconcellos 1921; Almeida 1995, 152.

³³ Seseña 1991, 40.

³⁴ La Mothe 1874. The author would be grateful for any other references or information on edible ceramics.

- ³⁵ Childs 1992; Cobb 1990.
- ³⁶ Childs 1995a, 21–2.
- ³⁷ Childs 1978, 179; Kermode 1998, 180.
- ³⁸ Kowaleski 1993, 24.
- ³⁹ Willan 1959, 81.
- ⁴⁰ Thompson n.d., no. 14, Upper Bugle Street.
- ⁴¹ Burgess 1976.
- ⁴² Alves *et al.* 1998; 2001.
- ⁴³ *contra* Hurst *et al.* 1986, 69.
- ⁴⁴ Gutiérrez 1995; 2000, 105–9; Childs 1995b.
- ⁴⁵ Allan 1983; Gaimster & Nenck 1997, 173–4.
- ⁴⁶ Roberts & Parker 1992, 12, 260.
- ⁴⁷ Evans 1987, 218.
- ⁴⁸ Childs 1978, 125.
- ⁴⁹ For aspects of the history of the plant and refining in Britain, see Allan 1984, 139; Brooks 1983.
- ⁵⁰ Singer *et al.* 1957, 6–7.
- ⁵¹ Mayans 1976, 73–7; Gisbert 1990.
- ⁵² Guiral 1989, 425.
- ⁵³ Mauro 1960, 232; Gual 1981, 93.
- ⁵⁴ Willan 1959, 317.
- ⁵⁵ Gutiérrez 2000, 107; Childs 1995b, 29.
- ⁵⁶ Willan 1959, 315.
- ⁵⁷ Pereira 1980, 544.
- ⁵⁸ James & James 1987, 232.
- ⁵⁹ Constable 1994, 187.
- ⁶⁰ Watt 1983; Rule 1995, 34.
- ⁶¹ Marmottans 1994; Bennett 1922, 57–8.
- ⁶² Talbot 1967, 77–8; Watt 1983.
- ⁶³ Castle & Derham 2005, 221.
- ⁶⁴ Castle & Derham 2005, 225.
- ⁶⁵ Gaimster 1997, 107.

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